

Abbreviated Articles

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The Canadian truckers are 'MAD'

The Hill, Harlan Ullman, 14 February 2022

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Full Articles

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On the ground in Ottawa the trucker protest in the shadow of the nation's Parliament building looks like no other protest witnessed in recent memory.

The large powerful machines of commerce and the highways of North America are lined up along with Canadians and their Maple Leaf flags demanding the right to work under their own conditions. If it doesn't look much like a protest, that's because in many ways it isn't, it's more like a strike.

Protest almost always implies a threat. The threat of Occupy Wall Street or Seattle's CHOP zone was that people will ignore the laws and rules of society. The threat of the BLM riots in the summer of 2020 was that if demands were not met buildings would burn. The threat in Ottawa is of a different order, these people are threatening not to work.

Nobody much cares if an anarchist protester decides not to go to their job as a furry friendly sex worker, or barista at the communist coffee collective, or Ivy League teaching assistant. But if men and women stop driving their trucks then everything, every product, every service, every object we reach for will be affected. The truckers even fit the physical image of a classic strike, all they need, to this New Yorker's eyes, is a giant inflatable rat.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government and their lackeys in the American media have begun to play their role as strikebreakers. Last week the truckers were all supposedly white supremacists or enablers of white supremacy. Like the rhetorical version of a piece of undercooked pasta tossed at the wall, that didn't stick at all. So now they have moved to the classic anti strike language of "outside agitators."

Now we are told all of these thick accented, flag waving Canadians are just dupes for nefarious American interests. This is a very old playbook, take this entry from the Canadian Encyclopedia about the 1919

general strike in Winnipeg, detractors "called the strike a revolutionary plot led by a small group of "alien scum." Winnipeg's leading newspapers took this view, too. In reality, there was little evidence that the strike was started by Bolsheviks and immigrants from Eastern Europe."

So is it here, in Ottawa. It is completely obvious from seeing and chatting with those here on the ground that this is not some American Trojan horse meant to infect the Great White North with Trumpism. The temperature is literally zero, which feels more like a punishment than weather, and these folks are taking selfies and dancing to Rick Astley.

No, Ottawa is not "under siege." I coursed into town, a block from Parliament Hill in an Uber that faced no traffic at all. Most stores and restaurants closest to the events are closed, but that is just a small chunk of this city, and a block away it seems to be business as usual, at least the pandemic version with its "For Lease" signs on closed businesses.

My driver told me that "of course we should be vaccinated and wear masks, but we need our freedom." He supports the truckers, though he is by no means a vaccine or COVID denier.

The left, in both Canada and the United States used to like it when the workers of the world united, or at least they claimed to. But this time it's a little different. This time the neoliberals are learning that Western workers don't want a global world in which elites mandate the actions and lifestyles of the people.

The workers want freedom. And as this protest, or strike, or whatever we choose to call it spreads across the world, our leaders cannot help but sit up and take notice.

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CNN, Sonnet Swire, 12 February 2022

While protests by truckers and others against Covid mandates continue to occupy Canada's capital, block US-Canada border crossings and add to supply chain headaches, Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky said he hopes trucker protests come to the United States as soon as this weekend to "clog up" major US cities.

Asked by The Daily Signal about his thoughts on the convoy and the potential for it to spill over into Los Angeles, home of Sunday's Super Bowl, or into the nation's capital, Paul said Thursday that "it'd be great" if the anti-mandate, truck-inspired protests popped in the United States to "clog things up."

"I'm all for it," Paul, a longtime opponent to masking and vaccine mandates, told the conservative media outlet. "Civil disobedience is a time-honored tradition in our country, from slavery to civil rights, to you name it. Peaceful protest, clog things up, make people think about the mandates."

He added: "I hope the truckers do come to America, and I hope they clog up cities."

Paul's office did not immediately respond to CNN's request for comment.

The convoy in Canada, which started as a protest of US and Canadian rules requiring truckers crossing the border to be fully vaccinated, has disrupted the capital of Ottawa as part of a broader movement against mandates. Protests have blockaded notable US-Canada border crossings, such as the Ambassador Bridge, a key trade corridor linking Windsor, Ontario, to Detroit, and inspired similar protests abroad.

The threat of truckers potentially clogging US roads was elevated on Tuesday when the Department of Homeland Security distributed a bulletin to law enforcement agencies, CNN previously reported. DHS warned that a convoy of protesting truckers "will potentially begin in California as early as mid-February and arrive in Washington, DC, as late as mid-March."

Meanwhile, the Canadian protests are already affecting Americans and the US economy. Workers in the Michigan auto industry could lose up to \$51 million in wages this week due to the trucker protest at the US-Canada border, according to Anderson Economic Group.

Three big US business groups have warned the protests are putting further stress on an already struggling supply chain. In a joint statement earlier this week, the US Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable and National Association of Manufacturers called on the Canadian government "to act swiftly to address the disruption to the flow of trade." Auto industry trade groups also warned the protests were causing "additional strain."

U.S. accounts drive Canadian convoy protest chatter

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Known U.S.-based sources of misleading information have driven a majority of Facebook and Twitter posts about the Canadian COVID-19 vaccine mandate protest, per German Marshall Fund data shared exclusively with Axios.

Driving the news: Ottawa's "Freedom Convoy" has ballooned into a disruptive political protest against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and inspired support among right-wing and anti-vaccine mandate groups in the U.S.

- Canadian police said Sunday they arrested protesters to break up the convoy, clearing them from the U.S.-Canada border crossing.

Why it matters: Trending stories about the protest appear to be driven by a small number of voices as top-performing accounts with huge followings are using the protest to drive engagement and inflame emotions with another hot-button issue.

- "They can flood the zone — making something news and distorting what appears to be popular," said Karen Kornbluh, senior fellow and director of the Digital Innovation and Democracy Initiative at the German Marshall Fund.

What they're saying: "The three pages receiving the most interactions on [convoy protest] posts — Ben Shapiro, Newsmax and Breitbart —are American," Kornbluh said. Other pages with the most action on convoy-related posts include Fox News, Dan Bongino and Franklin Graham.

- "These major online voices with their bullhorns determine what the algorithm promotes because the algorithm senses it is engaging," she said.
- Using a platform's design to orchestrate anti-government action mirrors how the "Stop the Steal" groups worked around the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, with a few users quickly racking up massive followings, Kornbluh said.

By the numbers: Per German Marshall Fund data, from Jan. 22, when the protests began, to Feb. 12, there were 14,667 posts on Facebook pages about the Canadian protests, getting 19.3 million interactions (including likes, comments and shares).

- For context: The Beijing Olympics had 20.9 million interactions in that same time period.
- On Twitter, from Feb. 3 to Feb. 13, tweets about the protests from have been favorited at least 4.1 million times and retweeted at least 1.1 million times.
- Pro-convoy videos on YouTube have racked up 47 million views, with Fox News' YouTube page getting 29.6 million views on related videos.
- The big picture: New research published in the Atlantic finds that most public activity on Facebook comes from a "tiny, hyperactive group of abusive users."
- Since user engagement remains the most important factor in Facebook's weighting of content recommendations, the researchers write, the most abusive users will wield the most influence over the online conversation.

- "Overall, we observed 52 million users active on these U.S. pages and public groups, less than a quarter of Facebook's claimed user base in the country," the researchers write. "Among this publicly active minority of users, the top 1 percent of accounts were responsible for 35 percent of all observed interactions; the top 3 percent were responsible for 52 percent. Many users, it seems, rarely, if ever, interact with public groups or pages."

Meanwhile, Foreign meddling is further confusing the narrative around the trucker protest.

- NBC News reported that overseas content mills in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Romania and other countries are powering Facebook groups promoting American versions of the trucker convoys. Facebook took many of the pages down.
- A report from Grid News found a Bangladeshi digital marketing firm was behind two of the largest Facebook groups related to the Canadian Freedom Convoy before being removed from the platform.
- Grid News reported earlier that Facebook groups supporting the Canadian convoy were being administered by a hacked Facebook account belonging to a Missouri woman.

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The several hundred Canadian truckers blocking the roads and bridges crossing into Detroit and other parts of Michigan and the U.S. are MAD. No, not mad as in insane or angry; instead, they are the new MAD, which stands for "massive attacks of disruption."

These types of protests are not new. Sit-ins, strikes, boycotts, marches and other disruptive tactics to seek political change are as old as civilization.

But today's disruptions are tectonically different. The reasons are the subject of my new book, "The Fifth Horseman and the New MAD: How Massive Attacks of Disruption Have Become the Looming Existential Danger to a Divided Nation and the World at Large."

A curious thing happened to society as it grew more advanced and modern in terms of the sophistication and extraordinary improvements of standards of living for most citizens. For every advance driven by technology, the diffusion of power and globalization, new vulnerabilities, weaknesses, dependencies and interdependencies were created.

Take supply chains and just-in-time specifications to maximize efficiency and cut costs.

A ship grounds in the Suez Canal for 10 days, and massive global interruptions break out. A plant manufacturing computer chips experiences a slow down due to COVID-19 cases and auto production lines shut down. A pipeline carrying gasoline that supplies most of northeast America is hacked and motorists are unable to fill up their cars.

About one quarter of U.S.-Canadian trade flows over the 1.6-mile-long Ambassador Bridge, or just under half-a-billion dollars a day. Already Ford and Toyota automobile makers are cutting back for lack of parts. Given the soaring inflation and other economic issues facing America and reflected in a volatile and unpredictable stock market that appears particularly out of control, this trucker disruption is no longer a protest. It could have profound legal and economic implications if it persists.

Suppose this blockade goes on for days or weeks and other blockades spring up. But if real economic damage results – as with the steel strike in 1952 and the air traffic controllers in 1981 – the situation could become violent.

The larger problem is that MAD is potentially existential. The COVID-19 pandemic is on its way to causing 1 million American deaths — more than the number of Americans killed on every battlefield this country has fought since 1775. Or suppose the pandemic migrates to animal and plant life, threatening food

supplies. Perhaps the most immediate form of MAD has to do with the U.S. government failing to provide what Americans need or demand.

A small example: Congress passed and the president signed the desperately needed \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill. How much has been allocated? Zero. Why? Congress had been unable to pass a budget for the fiscal year that began on Oct. 1, 2021.

The Canadian truckers' blockade represents a far more serious threat than the disruption that will follow. Multiply the possibilities and then add other disruptors that may have even more dangerous consequences to include climate change causing extreme storms, floods, drought, fires, heat and cold; cyberattacks; social media; terror; debt; and, perhaps most interestingly, drones. Imagine the carnage last Jan. 6 had protestors flown drones armed with explosives into the Capitol.

The warnings are too obvious and numerous to be ignored or dismissed. No matter how challenging states such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea may be, as well as non-state actors, the new danger is "the fifth horseman" – complementing the four other riders of the Apocalypse: war, death, pestilence and destruction – armed with the new MAD.

Seventy-five years ago, a Cold War was about to break out between East and West. With the advent of nuclear and thermonuclear weapons, a hot war was checked by the old MAD of mutual assured destruction and the Armageddon that would have destroyed much of mankind and the world. Today, a new MAD is the specter haunting us. Unlike the old one, it cannot be deterred.

If we are smart and recognize this danger and its consequences, MAD can be reduced, contained and possibly prevented. Canadian truckers are driving this point home now. But will we listen? And will we act in time?